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STRAY NOTES ON *Othello*

(1) I, iii, 219: 'pierced.' *Emendatio incertissima*: 'sierced'? Sierced = searsed = searched = probed = healed. In Malory, e. g., the process of 'searching' a wound often seems to stand, by synecdoche, for the result of the process: i. e., not merely 'probing' (the usual gloss), but rather really 'healing' or 'curing' seems to be the meaning intended. And cf. *Two Gentlemen*, I, ii, 116.

(2) II, iii, 124: 'To the platform, masters; come, let's set the watch.' Several critics, apparently including Furness, would have Montano enter here, just in time to witness Cassio's unsteady exit, instead of at line 65, on the ground that it would be improper for him to be 'tippling with people already flustered, and encouraging a subaltern officer, who commands a midnight guard, to drink to excess' (Steevens). But Montano had just been relieved of all responsibility; he was associating with the two men next in rank to Othello himself—the so-called 'subaltern officer' being Othello's chief-of-staff and actually, in due time, Othello's and Montano's successor as Governor of Cyprus; the proclamation (II, ii) commanded 'every man' to 'put himself into triumph,' with 'full liberty of feasting' till eleven o'clock, and Montano could hardly, with good grace, refrain from celebrating his successor's arrival and 'nuptial' as well as 'the mere perdition' of the enemy; Othello (II, iii, 2, 3) expressly countenanced some degree of indulgence on Cassio's part; and Montano (II, iii, 68) did not consider Cassio 'already flustered,' and was not 'encouraging' him 'to drink to excess' because quite unaware of his unusual susceptibility (II, iii, 34-44): accordingly, feeling himself far short of undue exhilaration, Montano very innocently and properly joined in the conviviality of the moment and naturally saw no harm in the relaxation of the others.

(3) III, iii, 14-18. Is not the dramatic necessity for this somewhat cumbrous and involved passage to be found in Emilia's speech, III, i, 44-53,—apparently two whole scenes away, but actually only twenty-five lines before, and therefore very fresh in the audience's memory? For after Emilia's positive affirmation of Othello's intention to take Cassio back into his favor and service, some such emphatic exposition of motives and contingencies is indispensable here in order to justify to the audience Cassio's personal appeal for Desdemona's intercession.

(4) IV, i, 245: 'Are you wise?' Furness quotes and supports Fechter's suggestion that this question should be spoken by Iago, aside, to Othello, in an effort to avert the impending outbreak which will only too probably jeopardize the success of all the Ensign's plotting. Certainly its form is perfectly appropriate for such a purpose, while it is mere tame anticlimax in Othello's mouth after his explosive ejaculation two words before. Furness fails to remark

the further argument for this emendation: after all Othello's genuine exclamations (lines 238, 245*a*, 249, 250), Desdemona answers him directly, in the second person, on the supposition that he has addressed her; here, on the contrary, even though a direct question is asked, she uses the third person, manifestly questioning someone else who has intervened between herself and Othello. Fechter directs Iago, while uttering these words, to seize the arm of Othello and stop him violently: some such action seems necessarily presupposed by the form of Desdemona's question. The only argument brought forward for retaining the present accepted arrangement of the text would seem to be this: Othello must speak this line in order to render intelligible his exclamation in line 250, 'I am glad to see you mad' (i. e., not wise); but line 250 remains perfectly intelligible even if the question in line 245 be transferred to Iago, for then Othello would simply be saying, in the bitterness of his anguish, 'I am glad to see you so brazenly casting discretion to the winds by acting so madly, for it settles my doubts and nerves me for the execution of my dreadful duty.'

(5) iv, ii, 145-147. Professor A. C. Bradley (*Shakespearean Tragedy*, 215) comments on this passage thus: '[Iago] was also unreasonably jealous; for his own statement that he was jealous of Othello is confirmed by Emilia herself, and must therefore be believed.' Surely this kind of criticism does a double injustice to Iago. In the first place, it misunderstands him by trying to make him out to be something that he really was not. For the logic is viciously fallacious: we might just as well say, 'Iago was unreasonably honest; for his own repeated statements that he is honest are confirmed by the repeated statements of everyone else.' No, the man who could jest about personal honor so cynically even to Emilia herself (III, iii, 302) can hardly be believed to have had any very sensitive feelings about marital fidelity. Moreover, to explain away Iago's machinations, or find a serious cause for them, on the ground of mere jealousy is to derogate as much from his greatness as is done in the parallel case of Hamlet when the heart of his mystery is glibly explained away on the ground of madness. In the second place, Professor Bradley's criticism underestimates Iago by not making him out to be something that he really was. Surely the strange 'and' for 'for' in 'I hate the Moor; *And* it is thought abroad, that 'twixt my sheets' (I, iii, 392, 393) was deliberately designed to give the line a casually incidental tone and show that it was really an afterthought, due to 'motive-hunting'; so also the strange parenthesis 'For I fear Cassio with my nightcap too' (II, i, 316). These cases supply the clue to the explanation of Emilia's 'confirmation' of Iago's alleged jealousy of Othello. In all three instances is it not giving Iago only due credit for the subtlety that we know to have been his, if we believe that he was practising his rôle, rehearsing to himself or to Emilia the reasons that would plausibly justify his actions, and in the

'Cassio' inspiration trying out an idea that he might subsequently use in arguing Othello into acquiescence—just as he threw out offhand a suspicion of Bianca (v, i, 85, 105) on the chance that it might prove useful later? Were not these groundless accusations against Othello and Cassio just Iago's way of experimenting on Emilia and himself in the workings of this unknown quantity, jealousy? And might not the 'Cassio' line be interpreted thus, retaining the original punctuation: 'I'll . . . Abuse him to the Moor in the rank garb (*On the ground that I fear Cassio with my night-cap too, as well as with his*)'? If so, Iago was here going over *verbatim* the speech that was to undo Othello: he was willing to besmirch his own wife's fair name in order to attain his object, viz., convince Othello of his sincerity and honesty. Professor Bradley's interpretation (see also his Note Q, p. 441) misses this fiendish subtlety, just as it too credulously characterizes Iago as jealous.

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THE COVENT-GARDEN JOURNAL EXTRAORDINARY

Some years ago in looking over the *General Advertiser* for Monday, January 20th, 1752, I found advertised for "this day at noon" THE COVENT-GARDEN JOURNAL EXTRAORDINARY, NUMB. I, Printed for J. SHARP, near *Temple-Bar*; but until recently no copy of this pamphlet has come to light. Now, thanks to the diligence of Mr. F. S. Dickson, of New York City, a unique and excellent copy has been added to the splendid Fielding Collection in the Yale Library.

It is a curious burlesque of Henry Fielding's Drawcansirian periodical, and is (as I conjectured in my edition of the *Covent-Garden Journal*, I, 57) written in an unfriendly humor. There is a leader of three pages in Drawcansir's manner (even to the extent of using *hath* uniformly) which takes up, using Fielding's historical method, the subject of transmigration of souls with particular reference to "a Vagabond metamorphosed into a Justice, and a Cook-maid [who has succeeded] to the Honours of her Mistress." Fielding's enemies took particular delight in ridiculing his assumption of the office of "trading Justice" and his second matrimonial venture. Page four has a burlesque *Journal of the War* in which Smollett is definitely referred to as head of a "flying Party" which still kept the field after Sir Alexander [Fielding] had declared a peace. A reconnoitering party finds "a small Hutt" [Smollett], and reference is made to a "northern Free-booter" who had "lately assaulted" Fielding [in *A Faithful Narrative*, January 15th].